

# RETREAT GUIDE

(D.I.Y Retreat during the pandemic)



## ***“Come with me... to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31)***

This is God’s invitation for all who hunger for a deeper relationship with him, who are weary from fighting life’s battles or wrestling hard questions. This guide has been prepared for you to experience rest and renewal by reflecting of God’s love, presence and invitations to you in this season of your life. While this guide is designed for an individual to experience and encounter God on retreat, it can also be used in a group setting. To do this, your group members can meet together online after spending time on their own, and share some of the fruits of their reflection. This will provide the social and relational aspects of group retreats. Alternatively, it can also be helpful to speak with a spiritual director to make sense your retreat experience.

### ***Introduction to retreat***

Going on a retreat is about creating the time and space to be with God as a “generous commitment to friendship with God, to form us in Jesus Christ” (Emilie Griffin). While we can practice various spiritual disciplines to help us be open to God, key spiritual practices that are helpful during a retreat include:

#### **1. Solitude (Creating space to be alone with God)**

This is an intentional setting aside time and place to be alone with God. In solitude, we seek a full turning to God who is in us and with us. We focus on him, we turn our minds, hearts towards him.

*My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him (Ps 62:1)*

We unplug or detach ourselves from everything that distracts us from being present with God. This include our handphones, tablets, laptops, social media, and even people, that we have become dependent on and can distract us. Solitude gives us time and space to explore and know ourselves in God’s presence.

#### **2. Silence (Clearing the clutter in our mind for communion with God)**

In the practice of silence, we turn away from careless speech and quieten down our thoughts. This interior stillness enables us to hear God who speaks in silence

*Be still before he Lord and wait patiently for him... (Ps 37:7).*

The silence returns us to the core of our being where the Holy Spirit’s presence is and open ourselves unconditionally to receive from God. Rather than an emptying, it is filling of our heart with God’s presence. This involves a gradual moving from outer silence (absence of speech or external noises), to inner silence (absence of discursive thoughts) to heart silence (yielded and surrendered will to God). Whenever distracting thoughts surface (and they will) as you try to become silent, do not resist or fight against those thoughts. Acknowledge them but do not entertain them. Allow let them pass or consign them to be attended to at another time after the retreat.

#### **3. Scripture Meditation (Listening to God’s Words in the heart for transformation)**

This practice involves reading a portion of scripture and reflecting on it deeply in order to focus on the mind and heart of God for our heart transformation – our mind, attitude and will.

## ***Preparing for your retreat***

Begin by setting aside time for your retreat in your calendar – anywhere from half a day to a full day or a weekend. Stop what you are doing. Take a break from the routine. This may require some advance planning and preparation. While this guide is designed for a half-day retreat (about 4 hours), you may wish to adapt it accordingly depending on your retreat duration. If you use this for a half-day retreat, you can choose to have it in the morning or afternoon depending when is most conducive for you (not rushed or pressed for time).

Go somewhere nice and quiet if you can. Preferably, a place away from home, routines or distractions. It could be in a park, on a beach or a quiet corner in a cafe. If you're not able to leave your home, find a quiet spot where you will be least interrupted or distracted. This can be in your room, a corner of your living room, balcony, garden etc. What makes a space sacred is the intention and desire of the person entering it – to retreat from normal life to be with God and God alone. Silent your phone if you're not able to turn it off. Resist the temptation to check your email, social media and phone. Let your family members know you're on retreat so that they won't disturb you.

Bring along with this guide your Bible, journal and writing & drawing materials. If you're going outdoors remember to pack your sunscreen, sunglasses, mask and hand sanitizer. Please refrain from bringing laptop, handphone, tablet, mp3 players, recreational reading, anything that will distract you.

## ***Schedule for a Half-day Retreat***

### **1.00 pm      Opening Session**

If you plan to go outdoors, plan to arrive at your retreat location at least 30mins to get settled and feel comfortable in your surroundings. Once you've settled in, read through the "Introduction" that will explain the theme and focus of this retreat. Then move on to the "Prayer Exercise: Arrival." This session is designed to help you to 'arrive' and enter into your retreat experience prayerfully and contemplatively.

### **2.00 pm      Prayer Period #1: Scripture Meditation**

Time to meditate scriptures using the "Lectio Divina" method. Invite God to speak into your soul through the prayerful receiving of his word. Don't rush through this. Make this a spacious encounter with God and journal your reflections on how you sense the Lord inviting you into a deep rest and renewal.

### **3.00 pm      Prayer Period #2: Reflection**

Spend time praying through the guided reflection and journal your thoughts. Take a walk, or a nap, or find a creative outlet to add balance and joy to your retreat.

### **4.30 pm      Review of Retreat**

This final part helps you to review your retreat experience based on the insights you discovered and the refreshment you received earlier. End your retreat with a spirit of thankfulness and praise to God. Ask God for his blessings as you move back into your daily tasks.

### **5.00 pm      End of retreat**

## ***Introduction to Retreat***

***“If you don’t come apart for a while, you will come apart after a while” ~ Dallas Willard***

Welcome to this half day retreat! We hope that this space will enable you to make sense of your experiences the last 3 months and help you to gradually transit back to a ‘new normal.’ For some of us, the past 3 months may have felt like being on the ‘battle ground’ or “war zone.” We have been functioning on hyper-vigilance as we seek to fight an invisible enemy by staying home, putting on face masks, packing hand sanitizers, regularly washing our hands, disinfecting our belonging, being mindful of social distancing, waiting in queues for grocery shopping, etc. The list goes on. We wore many hats as a parent, spouse, child, teacher, worker, leader ..... causing us to take up many more roles and responsibilities than before. Juggling and trying really hard to meet expectations have left many of us exhausted. We could be feeling weary and tired from always being plugged in and available as work and ministry move into an online space.

“Dangerous levels of exhaustion usually accumulate over a long period of time in which we are consistently living beyond limits, functioning outside our giftedness, or not paying attention to the sources of our exhaustion. When we are dangerously tired we are unable to be our best selves, we find it difficult to make wise and discerning decisions, we hoard energy rather than being able to give ourselves freely to others, and our bides may begin to break down under the stress and strain of it all.” (Ruth Haley Barton)

This is a good time to take a pause, retreat and rest. Interestingly, the military recognizes this need to pull back troops after being on the battle ground for too long. They term this wise tactic as a ‘strategic withdrawal’ as this act of retreating gives “an opportunity to rest the troops and tend to their wounds, to stop the enemy’s momentum, or to step back to get a panoramic view of what’s going and set new strategies.” In every battle, there’s a need to pull back to rest, heal and set new strategies before reengaging. None of us can fight 24-7 for 365 days. We all need to take a break, rest, allow God to tend our wounds, to get a perspective, and to review the battle from that perspective, inviting God to give us wisdom we need.

As you begin this retreat, we invite you to come as you are and to be open to God’s movement, and presence in your life as he reveals to you what he is doing in your life. He is already here waiting to meet with you...

### ***Prayer Exercise: Arrival***

Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes and take a few slow deep breaths...

Take some time to become aware of your breath. Breathe deeply and consider the following questions:

- What am I thinking about?
- What emotions am I feeling? (Stressful, worried, anxious, fearful, excited, peaceful etc)
- How does my body feel? What do you notice? (tiredness, stiffness, pain etc)
- Lord, how are you with me right now?

As you breathe, let the rhythm of your breath become a prayer.

Breathe in, "You are with me," Breathe out "I am not alone."

Breathe in, "Lord Jesus Christ," Breathe out, "I receive your love."

Breathe in, "Prince of Peace," Breathe out, "I rest in you."

Father, I trust you today to hold the people I love, to attend to the things I have left undone, and to meet me in my place of worry, doubt or fear. I turn my eyes and ears toward you and I look for how you want to love me today. Amen.

Read Psalm 63: What are you longing from God as you enter this retreat?

If you feel tired or exhausted physically, you may want to take a rest or nap now, and allow your body to recover in order to be refreshed to pray.

## ***Prayer Period #1: Scripture Meditation***

### **Silence**

Begin with quiet preparation of the heart. Come into God's presence, slow down, relax and intentionally release the chaos and noise in your mind to him.

### **Reading**

Read the scripture passage slowly and out loud a few times, lingering over the words so that they resonate in your heart. When a word or phrase catches your attention, stop and attend to what the Spirit is drawing your attention to. Be open to the word. Don't analyse or judge it. Listen and wait.

### **Meditation**

Think about the word or phrase that stands out for you? Why do you think that is? How does this passage connect with your life? Is there some idea, feeling or intention you need to embrace from it? if so, what? What might God be inviting you to be, know, understand, feel or do?

### **Response**

Take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, expressing your questions, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God's love. What is God leading you to pray? You may wish to write your prayer down. Sometimes that helps our minds from wandering.

### **Contemplation**

Move from prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God's presence and be open to God. How is God revealing himself to you?

#### **Isaiah 43: 1-5a (NIV)**

But now, this is what the LORD says—  
he who created you, Jacob,  
he who formed you, Israel:

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

<sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,  
you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.

<sup>3</sup>For I am the LORD your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;  
I give Egypt for your ransom,  
Cush and Seba in your stead.

<sup>4</sup>Since you are precious and honored in my sight,  
and because I love you,  
I will give people in exchange for you,  
nations in exchange for your life.

<sup>5</sup>Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

## ***Prayer Period #2: Reflection***

As you look back on the last 3 months, take time to be quiet before the Lord, invite Him to help you to be open to Him and to 'see' how he has been present and at work in your life.

1. What were some significant things that happened to you?

2. What are some things that have changed for you in this season? List them down.  
(Includes physical or emotional changes, thoughts, faith, work, ministry, family etc.)

3. How do you feel about these changes? Take your time with this, sometimes it takes a while before we know what we feel. Name your emotions – anger, fear, anxiety, distress, sadness, at peace, rested, trusting.

Loss and grief are topics most of us are not comfortable with. We prefer when they are far away and touch other people's lives. However, when our lives are impacted by quarantine, an illness, or the need to prevent the spread of it we are forced to look at what we've lost because of it. As this virus spreads around the world the amount of loss and grief continue to accumulate. There is a temptation to brush off the grief of our losses by comparing it to what others have lost which seems more. But that is not helpful. We need to name and grieve our losses if we want to move on. Our losses could be the wedding you weren't able to attend, the holiday or trip that's been cancelled, the work you had to leave unfinished, or the projects you've been working on that you'll not get to present and execute. There are also relational losses. The inability to meet up with colleagues because of work rotations, church members who sit with you or if you live alone, you have lost contact with friends and acquaintances over the last few months. If you live with others, you have lost your independence and some precious time alone. Besides these, we also face the loss of control (or the illusion of it) over your time and energy, structures, roles and identity.

Take some time to name and write down these losses in the presence of God.

The Psalmists were not shy about expressing the whole range of emotions to God. In fact, there are more lament Psalms than any other genre. In these laments, the Psalmists engaged their pain, questions and anger within the framework of their covenant relationship and submission to God.

There are a few key movements within the lament Psalms. Let's look at Psalm 44 as an example of these movements:

Direct address to God: (Psalm 44:1)

Protest: They tell God what is wrong. (Psalm 44:9-22)

Petition: They tell God what they want Him to do about it. (Psalm 44:23-26)

Praise: They express trust in God today, based on His character and His action in the past, even if they can't yet see the outcome. (Psalm 44:1-8)

Write your lament

As you think about the losses you named, what would it look like to write a lament to God? If you would find it helpful, take some time with the four movements above and write out your thoughts within this framework. Don't try to force any of the movements, but have a dialog with God as to what he might want to show you about himself or yourself.

Having given your situation to God and how has affected you, invite Him to reveal to you what he has been doing in your life. There is work that the Lord has done in your soul over these past months. Not only does God want you to remember what he's done in you as you move into the days ahead, but it might be helpful to recognize that this work he has done might just be the beginning of some new ways of being and living that significantly impact your life as well as your relationships with God and others for years to come.

Reflect on the following questions with God, asking his Spirit to reveal what he desires.

As you think about the past weeks, how has God been with you? Who has God been for you?

What has the Lord done in your heart during these weeks? What has he reminded you of? Revealed to you? Shifted in your perspective? Changed in you?

What are some 'gifts' you may have received this season? (rest, learning to trust, more time with family members, health)

Spend some time giving thanks to God for what he has done in you.

As you've begun to mine some of the gifts of this experience, now let's take some time to mine even more by looking toward the future concerning the invitations of God. Ask the Lord to reveal to you his invitations concerning your future. Although not all of these may be an invitation right now, are there any new ways of being or shifts God is inviting you to make or continue, through his help and power, as you move ahead:

in your relationship with Him?

in your relationships with those close to you?

in the way(s) you relate with yourself?

in your perspective?

in the way you do life or how you focus?

in your view of and/or approach to your work and those you work with?

What would you prioritise in this season? (the 'one thing' you need)

As you end this time, consider finding a symbol/ object, drawing a picture or making a collage to remind you of what the Lord has done in you during this time and on the other side the Lord's invitation is to you as you walk into the days ahead.

### ***Ending your retreat: Review of the Day***

1. What did I appreciate or enjoy from this retreat? What was difficult for me?

2. What were some significant discoveries, insights or awareness?

3. A name I will give to my retreat is \_\_\_\_\_

#### ***Closing prayer***

Dear God

I so much want to be in control

I want to be master of my own destiny.

Still I know that you are saying:

'Let me take you by the hand and lead you.

Accept my love

And trust that where I will bring you,

The deepest desires of your heart will be fulfilled.'

Lord, open my hands to receive you gift of love.

Amen

*(Henri Nouwen)*

Sources:

From Isolation to Invitation Retreat Guide, <https://www.sentwell.org/isolation-to-invitation>

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